

“The Whispering of Generations Past”: Kate Mosse’s Languedoc Trilogy

Abstract

In her fiction Kate Mosse, author of six novels and co-founder and Honorary Director of the Orange Prize for Fiction (now “The Bailey’s Prize”), frequently focuses upon the theme of bodily violence enacted upon women. Her protagonists, often young early career scholars of the twenty-first century find themselves in contact with ghostly sister selves belonging to the Cathar communities of Medieval France. The egalitarian and progressive politics of these historic communities preached equality of the sexes in the sight of God and believed in the central role of women priests in the spreading of a Christian faith based on love and tolerance. Oppressed by the Orthodox Christian church, whose most conservative factions still refer to the Cathars as the “great heresy,” Mosse pays witness to the violent retribution enacted upon its followers, whose communities eventually died out as a result. In Mosse’s Languedoc Trilogy, *Labyrinth* (2005), *Sepulchre* (2007) and *Citadel* (2012), young female travellers embark on quests of discovery that take them unwittingly into contact with the voices of these dead communities. In the process, this article argues that Mosse offers up a metaphor for the importance of maintaining an active dialogue between the voices of different generations of feminism. Despite being sometimes dismissed as “popular” rather than “serious,” this argument makes a claim for the political importance of Mosse’s writing in bringing back to contemporary awareness the stories of the lost Cathar communities and the shaping effect of their stories upon nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first-century sisterhood.

Kate Mosse (b.1961) is a British writer of six novels, two works of nonfiction and a third forthcoming (2015), and two published plays and a third in progress. She is also co-founder and honorary director of the Orange Prize for fiction, which was awarded between 1996 and 2012 to “outstanding fiction by women from throughout the world.”² The launching of the Prize was in part prompted by a perceived crisis in the standing of contemporary women’s writing in comparison with what could have been argued to have been a kind of “Golden Age” of literary feminism during the 1970s and 1980s. After the explosion onto the scene of women’s publishers, such as Virago, The Women’s Press, Sheba, Pandora, and Onlywomen Press, during that period, suddenly literary feminism seemed to take a kind of cultural “dip.” The nadir, it could be argued, was reached in 1991, when not a single book authored by a woman writer was included on the shortlist for the Booker Prize. Imelda Whelehan articulates the problem in terms that can be understood as coming from within as well as from outside feminism: “In the mid-nineties, were we in danger of simply ‘re-inventing the wheel . . .’” (xv).

That moment of crisis, however, also signaled the emergence of a new generation of feminists. As second wave feminists began to contemplate the possible demise of contemporary women’s writing as a force for canonical change, Whelehan reminds us that what might be interpreted as a moment of cultural “gloom” coincided with the birth of a “third wave . . . in America.” She continues, “Rebecca Walker had used the term in 1992 in an article for *Ms.*, and her anthology *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* was published in 1995 . . .” (Whelehan xvii). Whelehan, like many other feminists, utilizes the term waves in a manner that appears to coincide with an awareness of generational difference. The tidal metaphor is interesting in that it requires a persistent pattern of ebb and flow that shows how any movement forward must also in part

regroup, reconnect, and re(-)cover at least some of the ground that has gone before. However, the tides offer up only one possible understanding of the term waves: another relates to sound waves, and this understanding of the metaphor is more helpful than that of tidal flow in relation to Mosse's fictions. Her novels connect women, not of contiguous but of distant generations, separated by centuries, whose only means of contact is through ghostly echoes, sometimes in words literally heard on the breeze, sometimes through a vertiginous sense of déjà-vu, and ultimately through a visual manifestation of apparitions, as occurs at the very end of her Languedoc Trilogy, the constituent novels of which are *Labyrinth* (2005), *Sepulchre* (2007), and *Citadel* (2012). Consistently, however, those points of sensory contact are positively experienced, genuinely "felt" as a moment of sisterhood with a shadow self guiding, and supporting those whose struggle also affirms political faith. Connection rather than separation is the way forward for feminism.

Nevertheless, the connection this article identifies as existing between Mosse and feminism – for some – may seem contentious. Mosse's work is not always considered "feminist" or even "serious," a resistance that might derive, in part, from it being read as "popular" rather than political. Because so much of her writing engages with a kind of travelogue or regional landscape, it also gives it an air of "holiday reading." Certainly, in Mosse's novels, one will find no mention of the term feminism, let alone the first, second, or third waves. What one will find is a sustained commitment to the importance of women's stories, the centrality inscription plays in both political oppression and political liberation, and the essential requirement that women listen to the echoes of those women who have gone before them. For Su-Lin Yu, written testimony is one of the key ways in which the generations of feminism are not just enabled to reconnect with the past but are further enabled to shape the future: "Historically, it has been women's personal stories that have provided the evidence of where the movement needs to go politically . . ." (887).

In relation to this term History, one finds a different understanding of Mosse's use of the travelogue form. Meticulously researched, indeed steeped in the culture of the Languedoc-Rousillon region of South-West France, what is sometimes assumed to be travelogue writing is actually a form of painstaking documentary realism, within which the author roots two things: a political engagement with women's role in Medieval Cathar communities and an understanding of haunting that enables otherwise lost and buried narratives of oppression to come to light for a new generation of twenty-first-century readers. In the process, Mosse offers up a metaphorical message for contemporary feminism in her demonstration of how each new generation of feminists must engage with those that preceded (often long preceded) it, as well as how previous generations of feminists need to reach out to that new generation to ensure that their struggles are not lost. Both have equal roles to play in ensuring the future of feminism.

The Languedoc Trilogy

All three novels of the Languedoc Trilogy juxtapose two different periods to demonstrate how violence and storytelling reverberate across the centuries. In *Labyrinth*, it is 1209 and 2005; in *Sepulchre*, it is 1891 and 2007; and in *Citadel* it is 1942 and AD342. This juxtaposition enables a form of echo to be established, whereby the stories of the past seep up through the ground to be heard by the ears of a new generation. All three novels in the Trilogy explore the region's cultural and political heritage and its inscription within its own ancient language, Occitan. Languedoc-Rousillon is a region with a long history of scholarship: according to *The Independent* newspaper, "the University of Montpellier is reputed to be 'the world's oldest continually operating university'" ("Complete Guide") and its landscape is redolent with ancient and medieval history. The Cathars (still in some more conservative versions of Catholicism referred to as "the great Heresy") were a Christian sect thought to have entered Europe in the eleventh century, possibly "from Persia by way of the Byzantine Empire, the Balkans and Northern Italy." This region of France was considered safer territory than most for the Cathars in the medieval period, deemed "famous . . . for its high culture, tolerance and liberalism. . . . By the early thirteenth century Catharism was probably the majority religion in the area, supported by the nobility as well as the common people" ("Cathars"). In relation to generations of feminism, it is also a sect in which women were granted a much greater opportunity for leadership than was permitted by the Orthodox Church.

In line with the founding of Montpellier University, the Cathars are also reputed to have formed a highly literate community. They fervently believed that the texts finally incorporated into the Bible were only a selection of the many sacred texts written by early Christians, and, as Mosse explains in *Citadel*, they continued to argue that this selection reflected only its most Orthodox and exclusory members, excluding those who preached "equality under faith" (*Citadel* 285). Again, analogies pertain to the dangers of feminism warring against its own sisters. Yu, writing on third wave feminism, emphasizes the positive legacy left by the second wave through the endorsement of the slogan "the personal is the political" (Yu 878). Yet, she also warns that second wave feminism is more likely to be associated with "a unified, coherent feminist community" (884) amounting to a "normative version" (885) that risks, in particular, marginalizing cultural and racial difference in its determination to affirm itself as "a single, unitary movement that treats sexism as the primary site of oppression in society" (885). As a critic interested in the political importance of personal testimony, Yu identifies the importance of not only recognizing difference but also documenting difference and then ensuring the ongoing survival of that documentation. This is also the Cathars' struggle.

Sure enough, one of the key elements of the historic quest Mosse outlines in the Languedoc Trilogy is the importance of the written word to those who fight for justice, and several characters risk or lose their lives to protect these "heretical" fragments. In both *Labyrinth* and *Citadel*, texts are smuggled out of occupied territory, concealed under clothing. In *Citadel*, we watch the slow, painful progress of the seriously ill Arinius, a thirteenth-century monk who travels on foot into the Sabarthès Mountains to conceal in their caves a piece of papyrus reputed to date from the time of Christ. In the modern-day chronotope of all three novels, archaeological and other discoveries are made by young female early-career researchers who stumble across these and similar finds and, in doing so, find themselves inside a kind of community ghost story. That story comprises the echoes of many voices, voices revealing that despite the apparently accidental intrusion of these women into the story, in fact they are chosen: these characters prove to be modern-day doubles or sisters to the women across history and take up and reignite the Cathars' cause in finding the lost texts. From a feminist perspective, it becomes clear that, alongside the need to document the testimonies of the

culturally silent, this quest to reengage with the Cathars' struggle finds another direct analogy in the second-wave feminist literary project, undertaken by Virago and other women's presses, to reclaim and republish a range of female-authored "literary classics" that would otherwise have been lost to posterity.

Mosse never shirks the battle-scars such struggles leave, presenting her reader with several graphic scenes of violence inflicted upon individuals and communities. Take as an example the attack in chapter 20 of *Labyrinth*, in which a group of Cathar villagers is hiding out in a local farmhouse trying to evade capture by the Crusaders. On being discovered, they know certain death awaits. Picking them off, one by one, their commander has his sport, leaving until last a fourteen-year-old girl, around whom he paces, considering: "He was in no hurry and there was nowhere for her to run." Suddenly pouncing on her, he tears open her clothes, pulverizes her face with his fist and stabs her in the stomach "With all the hate he felt for her kind . . . again and again, until her body lay motionless before him" (*Labyrinth* 197). Not content to leave it there, he turns her over "and, with two deep sweeps of his knife, carve[s] the sign of the cross on her naked back" (197). This shocking violation of a child in front of a young soldier, himself reduced to tears, his uniform "stained with vomit and blood" (197), is horrifying to read. However, it demonstrates how Mosse's novels typically engage with characters of all ages who are determined to fight for existence, recognition, and identity in the face of profound opposition. In that context, fear, which is revealed to be the "flip side" of courage, is simply a by-product of facing the future with an ongoing commitment to one's community, its stories and subsequent generations. Once again, it is in this aspect of her writing that one can read, in Mosse's depiction of the Cathars, a metaphor for feminism and, in her founding of the Orange Prize, a similar refusal to engage with the fear that women's writing might be in decline. "Pas a pas"/"step by step" is the reiterated phrase voiced by the Cathars, their lives existing as a testimony, bearing witness across the ages, affirming their existence in the face of violent oppression. In the case of the various "waves" or generations of feminism, similarly, such footsteps echo in the literal meaning of the phrase the Women's Movement.

Women, Writing, and Bodily Inscription

The literal carving out of violence upon the girl's body in the farmhouse reminds us of another second wave feminist literary concept emerging out of French political resistance: "écriture féminine"/"writing the body." When, in 1975, the French feminist Hélène Cixous wrote, "Woman must write herself . . . Woman must put herself into the text," she introduced both a celebratory clarion call to women writers and an immediate challenge to overcome. It is from writing, she argues, that women "have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (245). In the context of Mosse's writing, we see also how the need to write one's own body upon society's "text" becomes a way of fighting back against the desecration patriarchal violence has inflicted upon us down the ages. Women's writing, then, is similarly written in the face of violence and must somehow counter this by imprinting the woman's body directly onto the page. Cixous was of course accused, even in the 1970s and 80s, of a reductive essentialism or, worse, a utopian lack of material

engagement with the world out of which and in relation to which writing, creativity, and literary production exist. When she calls that struggle for writerly affirmation a “fatal goal,” it appears to be hyperbole. Until, that is, one reads Mosse’s *Languedoc Trilogy*, for here, Cixous’s rhetoric starts to make perfect sense.

To fill out some plot details, *Labyrinth* tells the story of the meeting-point across centuries of two young women: Alice Tanner, a twenty-nine-year-old early-career researcher, presently taking a break as a volunteer at an archaeological dig in the Sabarthès Mountains, and thirteenth-century Alaïs, the seventeen-year-old wife of Guilhem, a French knight and nobleman, based at the castle at Carcassonna (thirteenth-century Carcassonne). Alaïs is special, arguably the primary ghost in the *Trilogy* (though this does not become fully clear until the final volume of it). Her relationship with her environment is utterly grounded, symbolically conveyed by the journeys she takes from the castle on foot and by her cloak, a signature garment hand embroidered by herself for her wedding day. Hemmed and edged with “an intricate blue and green pattern of squares and diamonds, interspersed with tiny yellow flowers” (*Labyrinth* 30), as Alaïs walks it skims the ground and places her in an elemental connection with her surroundings: “By the time she reached the bottom [of the slope], the hem of her cloak was a deep crimson and soaking wet . . . The tips of her leather slippers were stained dark” (39). So many of Mosse’s young women are lone travelers, and Alaïs is no exception, continually challenging the expectations of a young noblewoman of her time, as she slips alone at dawn, from Château Comtal in Carcassonna, a dagger at her waist, to gather herbs from the river bank or, later in the text, when she rides alone from Carcassonna to Besièrs (modern-day Béziers), braving capture at the hands of two renegade French soldiers in a desolate wood en route. In many ways, she is the typical female Gothic heroine, identified in 1976 by Ellen Moers, another second wave feminist, as a “woman who moves, who acts, who copes with vicissitude and adventure.” Via the extreme circumstances imposed by the horror of Gothic violence, these characters are “forced to do what they could never do alone . . . scurry up the top of pasteboard Alps, spy out exotic vistas, penetrate bandit-infested forests” (Moers 126). Two points of departure separate Mosse’s characters from those about whom Moers is writing. First, nobody “forces” Alaïs to leave the castle; she actively does so of her own accord, deliberately flouting others’ concerns for her safety. Second, there is a clear contrast between what Moers describes as “pasteboard Alps” and the Sabarthès Mountains, as depicted in these novels. With Mosse’s characteristic documentary detail, she reveals her intimate knowledge of the landscape, as Alice Tanner looks about her and takes in what she has been told of the seasonal changes affecting the landscape:

. . . in the winter the jagged peaks . . . are covered with snow. In the spring, delicate flowers . . . peep out from their hiding places in the great expanses of rock. In early summer, the pastures are green and speckled with yellow buttercups. But now, [in July,] the sun has flattened the land into submission, turning the greens to brown. (*Labyrinth* 4)

As early as the second page of the first volume, Mosse introduces the mountains, but, in the very first words of that volume, we encounter Alice and, most fittingly, the first thing we learn about her (even before her name) is that she has a flesh wound: “A single line of blood trickles down the pale underside of her arm, a red seam on a white sleeve” (*Labyrinth* 3). The source of the cut is not a fresh injury, but an old scar that will not heal, a wound again connecting contemporary womanhood

with sister selves across time. Straying from her allotted path, Alice is tempted to dig deeper and further than instructed and, as she does so, she finds a concealed cave entrance. Inside she stumbles over two skeletons, dislodging the positioning of one of the skulls and discovering a stone ring, carved with the labyrinth symbol of the novel's title. Immediately the uncanny is released from its bedrock: "She can feel malevolence crawling over her skin, her scalp, the soles of her feet" (12).

This tactile engagement with the earth cements the connection between Alice and Alais. Similarly elemental to Alais's sweeping progress down the hill is Alice's digging down into the earth, and, in both cases, ghosts are conjured up. As Alais stands in the grass, she perceives "the presence of the past all around her . . . Spirits, friends, ghosts . . . shar[ing] their secrets . . ." and recognizes, too, how "all who were yet to stand here" would be connected (Labyrinth 39–40). By the end of the Trilogy, we will realize that many characters are connected to Alais, but at this stage, we only position Alice in this role. In keeping with the earthiness of the connection, the relationship between the two women is one of an almost vertical superimposition, Alice's reaction to the skeletons being experienced as *déjà vu*. This response impels a temporal trap door to open:

Alice has the sensation of slipping out of time, as if she is falling from one dimension into another. The line between the past and present is fading now in this timeless, endless space. . . . Alice feels a sudden jerk, then a drop and she is plummeting down through the open sky . . . towards the wooded mountainside. The brisk air whistles in her ears as she plunges . . . Alice hits the ground running . . . (21)

The repetition of Alice's name in this passage is not an accidental side effect of abbreviating the original, but a feature of the passage in full, for the running girl metamorphoses from Alice into Alais, Alice's experience being simultaneously "out of the body" and utterly bodily.

One of the interesting aspects of characters' engagement with the uncanniness of the landscape of the Languedoc-Rousillon region is that these shifts combine vertical and horizontal axes, becoming almost cruciform in themselves. As well as the vertiginous shifts between chronotopes we have just seen Alice undertake, several of Mosse's characters climb vertically into the mountains, when concealing or unearthing the dead, then squeeze horizontally into fissures in the rock in order to access the innermost secrets of the Trilogy. In all the novels, human intervention into the landscape is required in the form of infiltration and excavation. In *Sepulchre*, however, which is the most modern novel of the Trilogy in the sense of taking us back in time only as far as the end of the nineteenth century, our modern-day early-career researcher, 28-year-old Meredith Martin, enters the story as she goes horizontally into a wholly engineered cave, traveling by Eurostar via the Channel Tunnel. Meredith is working on a biography of Claude Debussy. Though a study driven by single-minded ambition and the determination to secure her own reputation through securing that of a "great man" ("She was determined to write not just another Debussy memoir, but the book, the biography" [*Sepulchre* 69, original italics]), the motivation for this journey to France is actually inspired by the search for two women. The first is "a lead about Debussy's first wife, Lilly" (70), the second and more compelling is the search for her birth mother's ancestry. Jeanette, Meredith's biological mother, becomes pregnant as a teenager and, though Meredith's grandmother, Louisa,

tries to help bring up Meredith, Louisa's death from cancer leaves Jeanette unable to cope. Two years later, Jeanette commits suicide; Meredith is then taken in by one of her mother's "distant cousins" (92), Mary, who later adopts her. Meredith's only inheritance from Jeanette is a story of female melancholia, two old photographs, and a piece of original music which Louisa, a concert pianist, played as her signature piece. Immediately we see how these generations of women are sewn together through the inheritance of story rather than estates, as if stories and storytelling are themselves gendered feminine, as opposed to patrilineal descent, which is traditionally measured in estates and property.

Meredith's search for the two women identified above unearths, in its turn, the two women at the center of the late nineteenth-century chronotope of *Sepulchre*, seventeen-year-old Léonie and her beautiful mother, Marguerite, a widow in her forties. *Sepulchre* opens in a churchyard amid a funeral setting. Though we do not yet know it, it is a sham ritual put on for show and, as the "heavy thud of earth" (*Sepulchre* 4) falls on the empty coffin, a shadowy figure at the edge of the cemetery takes the reader's, though not the characters' attention: "He cuts a sharp figure, the sort of man to make une belle parisienne touch her hair," but he wears "an expression of great intensity on his face. His pupils are black pinpricks in bright, blue eyes" (4). The watcher turns out to be a gangster called Victor Constant, and the funeral, purportedly of his ex-lover Isolde, has been organized by Léonie's brother Antoine, Isolde's new lover. Only by convincing Victor of Isolde's death can Antoine save them both from violent retribution.

As we have seen, Mosse never flinches from engaging with violence imposed upon women, and, in this novel, Victor takes revenge against the mother figure, Marguerite. This is violence of an entirely sexual nature, and it begins as a type of predatory impudence. At a dinner engagement with her new partner, General Georges Du Pont, Victor interrupts their meal to enquire after the whereabouts of Antoine. Cautiously evasive in her response, Victor's irritation is aroused and, though superficially courteous, he "look[s] down on her with [his] sharp, pinpoint pupils" (*Sepulchre* 35) and, "without warning, he reach[es] down, [takes] her hand from where it lay in her lap, and raise[s] it to his mouth" (37). Superficially, a gesture of gallantry, the implication is that Marguerite's beauty and active sexuality combine to make her "fair game." Certainly, Marguerite is aware of her own attractiveness, and, on entering the restaurant earlier, it could have been argued that she was parading it, as she feels her partner swell with pride and realizes "he was aware that every man in the room was jealous of him" (30). As the passage continues, her coquetry grows, as she: "parted her lips slightly, enjoying the way he colored from beneath his collar to the tips of his ears. It was her mouth . . . [that] carried both promise and invitation" (30). In this highly suggestive if delicate foreplay, we can well identify, in Victor reaching into her lap without promise or invitation, and taking and kissing her hand, an implied reference to cunnilingus. The action is simultaneously a threat and an insult, for as Alain Corbin reveals in his study of nineteenth-century sexual behavior in France, "the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie had a phobia of tactile contact; consequently it is hardly surprising if prostitutes are forbidden to clutch at passersby or to embrace or kiss a partner" (217). Here, clutch and kiss are combined in one "snatch," itself implying knowledge of Marguerite's potential for promiscuity as well as a determination to take what he wants by force, if required. From one haunting sense of being trailed to another: Marguerite's encounter with Victor provokes another unsettling sense of *déjà vu*: "the look of the man sent a memory scuttling across Marguerite's mind, although she was certain she did not know him." This observation, combined with her subsequent glance "at the gold signet ring on his left hand, looking for clues as to his

identity” and the simple addition that she “had known many men . . . [and] always knew the best way to be, to speak, to flatter, to charm on a moment’s acquaintance” (36) all suggest Marguerite’s past to have been one in which sex is traded for social advancement, and Victor’s interruption shorthand for his knowledge of it. Later, Victor will call at her house, charm his way through the door, tie her to a chair, interrogate her again about Antoine, this time under torture, and eventually kill her. Four chapters intrude between the moment Marguerite finally loses consciousness and our return to the scene. Her body now lies on the chaise longue, to which Victor has moved it. As an act of final violation, we see him rebuttoning his trousers and lighting a cigarette: he has raped her corpse in yet another shocking violation of the woman’s body. According to Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen, “much of what we call culture comes together around the collective response to death” (Goodwin 3). In Mosse’s work in general, and *Sepulchre* in particular, death persistently accrues around the woman’s body and addresses, as well, two of Goodwin and Bronfen’s central rhetorical questions: “Who or what represents the corpse?” and “What kind of voice does the body have in the text, the linguistic traces it leaves behind?” (6) – questions with which *Citadel*, the final volume of the Trilogy, also opens.

In the prologue to *Citadel*, dated August 1944, even before we are introduced to nineteen-year-old Sandrine, the central female character in that novel and an active member of the French Resistance, we are introduced to death. The opening words read, “She sees the bodies first” (*Citadel* 3), as two corpses, one male and one female, hang in the heat like meat in a butcher’s shop. Time curls back on itself here, and chapter 1 returns us to July 1942. Despite only being set two years previously, the Sandrine we meet here, as she wakes in her bedroom at home in Carcassonne, is a much more innocent, apolitical character. She lives with her older sister, Marianne, both of their parents being dead, and Marianne plays an active role in keeping her “young.” What immediately strikes the reader of the entire Trilogy is how similar this ingénue, Sandrine, is to the Alaïs of chapter 1 of *Labyrinth*, whom we also meet as she wakes in her bedchamber in that very same city seven-hundred years earlier. This sense of readerly déjà-vu is reinforced, as Sandrine suddenly experiences a very similar sensation to that which Alice will experience sixty years later: “A sensation of slipping out of time, falling from one dimension into another through white, endless space” before the sense of being pursued by soldiers from another time (*Citadel* 14). A further comparison with Alaïs occurs as Sandrine leaves the house. Though she travels by bicycle rather than on foot, like Alaïs, she ignores any advice that places physical restrictions on her movements and “felt her mood lift as the air rushed into her lungs” (21).

At this point, let us pause to consider the continuation of the scene from *Labyrinth* discussed earlier. On arriving at the riverbank, Alaïs gathers some medicinal herbs before allowing herself to doze off. Suddenly, “the sound of a bird screeching overhead woke her” and, as it does, she spots “a piece of heavy, dark material, puffed up by the water.” Wading into the water, Alaïs discovers it is the body of a drowned man, “face down in the water, his cloak billowing out around him” (*Labyrinth* 45). A comparison with Sandrine’s journey to this same spot in *Citadel* reveals the two passages to be almost identical, with only certain markers of modernity being present to differentiate between them. Again, Sandrine dozes off; again, she is jolted awake, this time by “a squeal of tyres on the road as a motorbike took the corner too fast” (*Citadel* 26). Again, she spots a man’s jacket in the water, caught on a branch, but this time the man has struggled free from it and is endeavoring to swim away. Wading in and helping him from the river, she is poised beside him on the bank when

she suddenly realizes there is somebody behind her and turns too late before being hit over the head and thrown back into the river. When she regains consciousness, both men have gone.

Where Alaïs discovers a corpse, the man Sandrine discovers is still (just) alive. As we will see, Mosse revisits the same or similar names of characters across her Trilogy, suggesting a direct individual connection between them across time. Here we find a direct echo of Sepulchre, for this near-dead character is another Antoine, and he too flees from criminal forces, having temporarily escaped their clutches. Sandrine's intervention proves futile, however: in succeeding in dragging him onto the bank, she simply aids his captors, for it is they who have assaulted her, and he is taken to the mountains and tortured to death. In this case, Mosse tells the story from the perspective, not of the onlooker (as is more usual), but from the victim as "the iron bar came down again" (Citadel 63), and, three pages later, as he "hear[s] his nose crack, the splinter of it, then felt the blood, warm and wet, coating his dry lips . . ." (66). This is the final blow, the one that brings the relief of death, enabling Antoine to die with a smile on those lips, knowing his silence has denied his oppressors their appetite for information. The precise historical chronotope in Citadel details that point in history when Paris has just fallen to Nazi occupation and the resistant Vichy regime has been established in the South. As the novel progresses, a direct analogy is drawn between the Cathars' struggle during the medieval period and the struggle of the allied forces against Nazi expansion in Europe in the 1940s. As we learn in this novel, just like the Jewish victims of the Nazis, the Cathars of the medieval period were "forced to wear scraps of yellow cloth pinned to their cloaks" (356). Such parallels resonate across the Trilogy, for while information is denied to those who would use it for evil, it does not prevent echoes from the past carrying, by supernatural means, to those who have the ears to hear them and use them for good.

Sisterhood and Solidarity

Because of the political broadening out of the conflict in Citadel, for much of that novel the gender politics is different from the first two volumes of the Trilogy. There is far more emphasis on solidarity within a larger group of resistance fighters, male and female, and less – at least for most of the novel – about the lone woman and her solitary struggle. On occasions, male and female characters are also juxtaposed, as when Antoine's bloodied mouth in Citadel resonates with Alice's memory, right at the start of the Trilogy in Labyrinth, of standing at the entrance to the cave in which she finds the skeletal remains and contemplating "the metallic taste of blood and dust in her mouth, and . . . how different things might have been had she made the choice to go and not stay" (Labyrinth 5).

Though such male-female superimpositions exist, however, the persistent pattern across the Languedoc Trilogy is one of contact between women. Often this contact requires the mediating surface of inscriptions upon the earth, as the excavation of those buried in the ground traces out a sense of the importance of women's quest for sister selves written in blood and bone across the text. In part this reflects Cixous's call for women to "write your self. Your body must be heard" (250).

Indeed, the sense of hearing is crucial in the Trilogy, for the echoes of ghosts are most frequently heard, rather than perceived by any other sense. Sometimes the prominence of hearing results in the foregrounding of the political dangers of a failure to hear, nevertheless, and one of the tragedies of *Citadel* is the dislocated relationship existing between Sandrine's lover Raoul and his mother. Raoul's older brother, Bruno, believed to be his mother's favorite, dies four years prior to the events of the novel. Unable to recover from her loss, Bruno's death brings on a form of dementia in Raoul's mother, whereby she is never again fully present to Raoul, responding to him with continual questions about Bruno, standing in readiness for his return by the kitchen window. It is a recurrent pattern throughout the Trilogy that mothers of the main protagonists are either absent or dead before or during the narratives. Despite the inevitable grief this entails, for Mosse's female protagonists, the absence of direct maternal ties clearly operates as a liberating process, enabling them to forge their own destinies, uncluttered by a sense of walking in the mother's shadow. In Raoul's case, however, the scenario is different. Far from being free of maternal influence, he longs for an emotional connection with her and is guilt ridden when he delays going to see her. As with Marguerite in *Sepulchre*, Raoul's mother dies a tragic, lonely, and unpleasant death in her own home. In her case, however, it is not at the hands of violent forces, but of "natural causes," the loneliness of it deriving from the fact that Raoul's extended absence means her body is only discovered several days later by him, the water still over-running the kitchen sink and "a putrefying stench" in the room (*Citadel* 547).

Returning to Goodwin and Bronfen's question of what kind of voice is left behind in the text by the corpse, the scene in which Raoul says farewell to his mother for the last time is worthy of closer examination. Just before he goes on the run, Raoul goes to see her. In part, it is a scene of "au revoir," in part, a scene of mutual protection. As a fugitive member of the French Resistance, he tries to caution her that men may come to her house looking for him. The words they exchange show he fails to "hear" what she is actually saying. Her parting words to Raoul are "Got to keep my boys safe . . . Keep Bruno safe." Though Raoul immediately resents the singling out of Bruno's name, he fails to hear her use of the plural "boys." She is actually as aware of the need to protect her living son as her dead one. Second, he mistakes her next utterance, "They're coming" (*Citadel* 114), for a signal that his enemies are approaching: in fact it is a rallying call to the ghosts of the Cathars ("les bons hommes") who will rise up to vanquish the Nazi occupation. What she says next simply leaves him nonplussed: "The ghosts. I hear them. Waking, beginning to walk. They're coming." All he replies in response is "You haven't seen me" (115). On the contrary, it is Raoul who has failed to see (or more particularly "hear") her. His mother disengages with the present in order to reengage more fully with a historic past; her dementia is the price she pays for her determination to reconnect her lost son's death with the ongoing struggles of the living.

In fact, though Raoul is guilt ridden by his inability to protect his mother, both she and Sandrine, who becomes his lover, show themselves worthy of immense bravery on their own account. The final scene of torture in the novel is inflicted on Sandrine in chapter 130, by first Lieutenant Sylvère Laval and then Major Leo Authié. We first meet Laval early on in the novel, believing him to be a member of the Resistance movement. Only in chapter 26, following a demonstration against the Nazi occupation is it revealed that he is an infiltrator working with the police to discredit the partisans. Authié, however, is consistently drawn, a senior member of the Deuxième Bureau (the French intelligence agency), and a sadistic murderer who uses his religion to justify his violent atrocities. Among these one can include the murder of a priest after attending confessional and receiving

absolution for his sins: "He took his gun from his belt and fired through the mesh. The world turned red, blood staining the metal and the curtains and the worn old wood . . . The secrets of the confessional. Everyone talked in the end" (Citadel 643).

Sandrine's torture takes a striking pattern. Laval begins the interrogation in a manner that recalls the taunting and slaughter of the fourteen-year-old girl in *Labyrinth*, as well as the interrogation of Marguerite in *Sepulchre*. Tied to a chair with her head concealed in a hood, Sandrine is slapped, punched, and kicked by Laval and then nearly drowned as he plunges her head repeatedly into ice-cold dirty water. Finally, he tears at her clothing so that the buttons of her blouse come away, in an attempt at sexual humiliation. However, it is when Authié takes over that the process becomes truly terrifying and literally rapacious, penetrating right into her womb. First Authié removes her hood, and then he draws his gun. He pushes up her skirt and gradually inches the gun higher and higher up her inside thigh until Sandrine feels "the muzzle of the gun jabbing against her pubic bone...and realise[s] what he intend[s] to do" (Citadel 592). The precise details are left vague, rendering the act literally "unspeakable," but she is rendered infertile as a result. All we later read is that "the blood had dried between her legs, but she felt as if her insides had been ripped out" (594). Though Sandrine is rescued in an audacious heist, while the Gestapo are in the act of transferring her from the interrogation chamber by panier a salade, her girl/woman's body never has the chance to feel fully gendered again, her dreams of mothering a biological daughter being over.

Though robbed of the chance to become a literal mother, Sandrine's role as a possible foremother and role model to subsequent generations of readers is not lost on us. In not only Sandrine's case but also that of other women in Mosse's Trilogy, a persistent pattern of sisterhood established in the texts acts, paradoxically, like a maternal genealogy, and that spills over potentially into the reading community. Perhaps in order to shift the focus away from biological child-bearing and toward a political inheritance, Mosse often has to remove biological mothers and mothering from the narrative. In *Labyrinth*, for example, though Alais lacks a mother, her older and powerful friend Esclarmonde fulfils many of the facets of the maternal role, while also being a "sisterly" friend. This connection between the two women clearly differentiates Esclarmonde from Alais's actual biological sister, Oriane, and may in turn explain Oriane's hatred for Esclarmonde, whose role of healer and wise woman also renders her a threatening presence for this harsh, Orthodox regime. On Oriane's orders, guards attack Esclarmonde and rip out her tongue, requiring her last word in the book to be inscribed with ink on parchment. Alais's mother, too, is an enigmatic character. Dead before the start of the text, Alais is her father's daughter, whereas Oriane reflects, "she [Oriane] was too like their mother, in looks and character, for [their father's] liking" (*Labyrinth* 109). Only later do we learn that another of Mosse's character pairings is at work here, for this dead mother shares the name Marguerite with Léonie's mother in *Sepulchre*. As we have seen, the Marguerite of *Sepulchre* has a highly developed sexual past, but it is one that never undermines her commitment to her children, part of the evidence for which resides in her refusal to talk under torture.

By comparing the two Marguerites, we can see how Mosse uses these intergenerational pairings to renegotiate past failures in sisterhood and demonstrate the possibility for future reform. Though the Marguerite of *Sepulchre* may be flawed, she is far more sympathetically drawn than her originary "sister self" in *Labyrinth*. Though we never see this Marguerite for ourselves, her influence upon her

daughter, Oriane, is enough to cast doubt on the mother's fidelity to women. Returning once more to that opening scene in which Alaïs sneaks from her bedchamber while her husband Guilhem sleeps, Alaïs's key concern, throughout, is that her husband will awaken and wonder where she has gone. In actuality, we later learn that he has used her absence as an opportunity to spend time in bed with Oriane. However, in itself this triangle of desire reveals a further intriguing aspect to the sisters' relationship. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Oriane has been using Guilhem to elicit information about Alaïs's activities and alliances. In fact, Alaïs is Oriane's main fascination. This reverses what is usually seen as the homosocial foundation of patriarchal family structures, in which women become objects or prizes based upon powerful masculine alliances.

As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes in *Between Men*, an influential study of heterosexual marital relations written during the feminist second wave, "[t]he choice of the beloved is determined in the first place . . . by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival" (Sedgwick 21). In political terms, therefore, Mosse incorporates this rivalry between biological sisters into her work to complicate and loosen what is otherwise in her writing a very positive bond between women, and this must have implications for our reading of the Trilogy through different generations of feminism. As Sedgwick also puts it:

At this particular historical moment, an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women's friendship, "networking," and the active struggles of feminism. (2)

Is there no such bond between biological sisters in the Languedoc Trilogy? The answer is "yes," but we need to wait for *Citadel* before we find it, in the all-female cell of the Resistance collectively known as "The Citadel Network" and comprising Sandrine and Marianne as biological sisters, alongside another five young women: Lucie, Liesl, Suzanne, Geneviève, and Eloise. In keeping with the character pairings already identified, the name Marianne elicits a phonic echo of Oriane, but if the Marguerite in *Sepulchre* is a reformed version of the Marguerite of *Labyrinth*, then the Marianne in *Citadel* is the opposite of the evil Oriane of *Labyrinth*: Marianne and Sandrine are the best of friends. The lesbian continuum that Sedgwick identifies as a kind of glue for political and familial sisterhood is also in evidence in *Citadel*, not simply in the woman-oriented commitment the members of the group show to each other (though as early as chapter 25 in this one-hundred-and-fifty-one chapter novel, Sandrine discovers she is "suddenly overwhelmed by affection for this band of women" [*Citadel* 104]), but in the fact that Sandrine realizes that Marianne is involved in a long-term sexual relationship with Suzanne.

Among this group of seven women, several additional possible pairings could be identified. Like Marianne and Sandrine, Geneviève and Eloise are sisters, while Liesl and Lucie are potential sisters-in-law, for Lucie is the lover of Liesl's brother, Max, and falls pregnant with his child during the course of the narrative. The least obvious pairing would be Sandrine and Lucie, and yet it proves they constitute the most important pairing of all. The epigram to *Citadel* reads, "In memory of the two unknown women murdered at Baudrigues 19 August 1944," and, though we only learn this at

the very end of the book, Mosse pays testimony to these two unnamed women in the role she assigns to Lucie and Sandrine.

By the final chapters of *Citadel* Sandrine (who by now has adopted the nom-de-guerre “Sophie”) has become the number one target of the local Nazi collaborators, especially Authié. Eventually he tracks her to the village of Coustaussa, the location of the childhood family holiday home “Citadel” (from which both the novel and their Resistance cell derive the name). She comes out of hiding and surrenders, knowing the alternative is to witness Authié and his troops massacring the entire village population. As she does so, a gunfight ensues, during which she manages to kill Authié. Now all of the ghosts from the past two volumes of the Trilogy rise up en masse, standing firm like an army, “Thousand upon tens of thousands,” including Alaïs, Guilhelm, Esclarmonde, and Bruno (*Citadel* 667–68). Though the ghostly presence sends the terrified Nazis fleeing, Sandrine’s own struggle is not yet over. She and Lucie are taken prisoner and they regain consciousness, both fatally wounded, in a station outhouse. Both women know that death awaits and, as they lie there together, Sandrine considers how the next generation might have been shaped by their presence: “She would have liked a child, a daughter . . . They could have called her Sophie” (678). Thinking of Lucie and Max’s son, Jean-Jacques, “She knew Liesl would care for [him] like her own . . . The diaries that Lucie had painstakingly kept would help. About how brave Lucie was, how she fought every moment of her life to keep him safe” (679). The importance of such witness testimony is not lost on the Nazis either. Suddenly Sandrine hears a disembodied noise beyond the door: “boots . . . leather heels . . . then a key turning in the lock” (679). A German soldier walks in carrying two hand grenades and attempts to force one into Lucie’s mouth. Total annihilation of the evidence is what has been ordered, and, though Sandrine succeeds in dissuading him from stopping her mouth, he still removes the pin and lets it roll to Sandrine’s side. Her final thoughts are, “There was to be no reprieve” (680).

Conclusion

Though Sandrine and Lucie are silenced as characters, the testimony of the two unknown women who inspired their characterization is given fresh life and a new awareness through Mosse’s work. The message of the Trilogy is therefore clear: women’s testimonies will survive while literary feminism survives, and here we return to the specific importance of writing. Mosse’s project continually emphasizes the importance of the written word to the future of women’s liberation. As we read in *Citadel*, the Cathars’ insistence is never upon the individual and never upon the present, but always upon the collective and upon memory and testimony: “If we do not remember those who have gone before us, we are destined to repeat the same mistakes” (*Citadel* 310). Thus, each generation must take it “Pas a pas . . . There is everything to be gained by continuing along the path we have set ourselves” (315). Earlier on in this article, the following questions from the work of Goodwin and Bronfen were posed: Who or what represents the corpse? and What kind of voice does the body have in the text, the linguistic traces it leaves behind? (Goodwin 6). We have seen that, though Mosse employs the popular mode of storytelling for her narratives, the politics of it are far more “serious.” On one level they combine the regional and national politics of French Orthodox

religion, its oppression of the Cathars as “heretiques” and the carnivalesque massacres via which such oppression is made manifest. On another level Mosse adopts a specifically female-oriented quest, one in which women are both victors and victims. Though male and female corpses abound, Mosse’s central image of desecration is encapsulated by the female martyr.

Does Mosse’s Trilogy leave us, then, with the dispiriting response to Goodwin and Bronfen’s question that woman “represents the corpse” in Mosse’s work? In actuality, the politics of her Trilogy suggest otherwise. As Sandrine braces herself for the onslaught at Authié’s hands, she hears in her mind’s “ear” the ghostly echo in Occitan “Coratge”/“Courage” (Citadel 592). Although individual women are sacrificed in this Trilogy, their maiming and deaths are in the name of a wider sisterhood and a collective future. Repeatedly, a new generation of women emerges, and that generation resurveys, giving new voice to, and once again fully embodies and bears testimony to their forebears, whose words continue to echo like ghosts in their ears. Hence, revising the answer to Goodwin and Bronfen’s second question, the nature of the “trace” or “voice” that is left behind must resonate for a new female ear and, in doing so, take the form of a new “wave.” Sight and sound are shown, in Mosse’s work, to be crucial to this process, for through her use of ghostly voices, “déjà vu” metamorphoses into the “finally heard.” In this manner a sisterhood is established, not as an unrealistically utopian belief in women’s collective jouissance, but in a hard-worn and difficult commitment to “dig in” (to perpetuate Mosse’s use of archaeological tropes) and bear testimony to women and their stories – even the difficult ones – as a body politic and across generations. Despite the different ages to which her characters belong, her insistence throughout the Trilogy is upon continuity through storytelling. Irrespective of the historical period in which we find ourselves, we must affirm our shared existence through feminist testimony to an ongoing sense of a Women’s Movement. Thus do we walk in the shadow of those who have gone before, keeping alive their stories and their struggles and continuing together, *pas a pas*.

Footnotes

¶1 This title phrase is taken from Citadel (215), the third volume of Mosse’s Languedoc Trilogy. It encapsulates the manner in which this article argues that her writing encourages and calls for greater interaction between generations of feminism to secure the future of feminist testimony.

¶2 See “Kate’s Biography,” on the author’s website. Recently relaunched as the Bailey’s Prize; between 2012 and 2014, the future of the Prize was looking uncertain, following Orange’s withdrawal of their sponsorship in May 2012. In the intervening period, “High-profile private donors . . . stepped in to save [it] . . . after a scramble for a sponsor failed to come up with a long-term backer,” and, for 2013, it was renamed “the women’s prize for fiction” (Armitstead).

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